

principle about the possibility of a Counter Trade Arrangement which would enable Iraq to effect import of certain food items (especially wheat) against export of crude oil and oil products.

Hindi Salahakar Samiti in Ministry of External Affairs

166. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) when was the Hindi Salahakar Samiti reconstituted in the Ministry of External Affairs;
- (b) the number of sittings of the Samiti held during the last three years, year-wise; and
- (c) the efforts made to conduct meetings regularly?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (c) The process of re-constitution of the Hindi Salahakar Samiti of the Ministry of External Affairs is in the final stages. As soon as this is constituted, efforts would be made to hold its meetings regularly.

Improvement in Indo-U.S. relations

167. SHRI ANANTA SETHI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether any step has been taken by the Government to improve Indo-U.S. relations after the new President took the oath of office in that country;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the strategies proposed to be adopted to improve and expand bilateral relations with the United States of America?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Government has maintained regular interaction with members of the Bush Administration, both during the U.S.

presidential campaign and after President George W. Bush entered office on 20th January. Prime Minister and President Bush have been in contact with each other. Principal Secretary to Prime Minister and the National Security Advisor met the U.S. Defence Secretary Mr. Donald Rumsfeld in Munich on 3rd February, 2001. Our Ambassador in Washington has also had a productive meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell.

(c) President Bush has expressed a desire to foster a stronger and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries. The U.S. Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor to the U.S. President have also indicated that the U.S. would continue to broaden their engagement and develop closer relations with India.

Both sides agree that there is potential for increased cooperation between the two countries and share a desire for an early resumption of dialogue across the entire spectrum of bilateral ties.

Indo-China border dispute

168. DR. DASARI NARAYANA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the number of meetings of the Indo-China Joint Working Group on Boundary question held so far to solve the border dispute between the two countries;
- (b) the results achieved so far through these meetings; and
- (c) the issues which are yet to be resolved alongwith the details thereof and the view of both the countries thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) The India-China Joint Working Group on the Boundary Question has met twelve times.

(b) and (c) India and China seek a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question through peaceful consultations. We signed an agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control in **the** India-China